

Ottawa, Ontario
Former Potting House (now Maintenance Building)
Major's Hill Park

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The former potting house (now maintenance building) was built in 1901-1902 to designs prepared by the Chief Architect's Office of the Department of Public Works, under the supervision of Chief Architect David Ewart, as part of the Major's Hill Park greenhouse complex.

The building ceased to function as a potting house when the greenhouse complex was removed 1937-1938. Now the property of the National Capital Commission, the building currently serves as a maintenance shed.

See FHBRO Building Report 87-1 28.

Reason for Designation

The building was designated Recognized primarily for its historical associations and its architectural significance.

The potting house played a supporting utilitarian role in the city beautification phase of the development of Major's Hill Park, Ottawa's first municipal park. The construction of the potting house accompanied turn-of-the-century renovations to the then existing greenhouse, and the construction of a new conservatory, a two-storey summerhouse, and new fountains and walkways, all in accord with plans developed by Public Works to enhance the attractiveness of the park.

The potting house is a modest, domestically scaled building of rough-cut, irregularly coursed limestone. Its hipped roof and cross gable form echoes both the cruciform shape of the nearby conservatory and the pitched roof of the adjacent greenhouse. The decorative treatment of windows and doors, the off-set limestone chimney, the limestone porch and the building's original wooden shingles suggest the prominence given the potting function in the site's "city beautiful" development phase.

A one-storey limestone garage was added and carefully matched to the potting house in materials and detailing. It contributes to the aesthetic coherence of the structure, as does the modest iron railing added to the stone porch for centennial celebrations, replacing its wooden predecessor.

The choice of stone over brick for exterior walls, and brick for interior partitions, was important for maintaining the cool temperatures and shaded conditions required for successful potting.

.../2

The structure's environmental values, once considerable, have been reduced by the removal of all the structures and site elements associated with the park's early 20th century development.

The fenced-in yard and storage shed to the north detract from the aesthetic appeal. Nevertheless the former potting house remains a familiar and prominent landmark, particularly for those using the Inter-provincial Bridge connecting Ottawa and Hull, and visiting the new National Gallery and Museum of Civilization.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the building resides primarily in the picturesque domestic forms and elements of the original design and in the detailing which delineates those forms. Stone walls are built up in irregularly coursed rough-cut limestone and the basement and upper walls are separated by a plain dressed canted stone band. Among the important stone elements are the quoins at the building corners and window jambs, the complementary lintels and sills, the rough-cut voussoirs over the semi-elliptical windows and the front door, the front porch, and the rear chimney. The wood shingle roof, the original front door and the two-over-two window sash also make important contributions to the building design. All of these original design forms and materials should be maintained in future renovations.

The one-storey garage addition complements the original structure in design, detail and materials, and should be maintained. Should the garage door require replacement in the future, consideration could be given to a model more in harmony with the building's character.

The original interior layout has been modified to incorporate a modern kitchen and office for use by the NCC. The extent of further changes in plan is unclear. Surviving interior partitions and details from the period of the building's use as a potting shed should be identified and incorporated in any future change. The best use for the building is one similar to its original use as a potting house, and which takes advantage of its functional characteristics.

In contemplating future site development, consideration should be given to removal of the adjacent fenced-in works yard and shed. Plans for site treatment should seek to enhance the building's landmark value and to maintain its visual and functional relationship to Major's Hill Park, to the greatest possible extent.

1990.08.01